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COMBINED OPERATION



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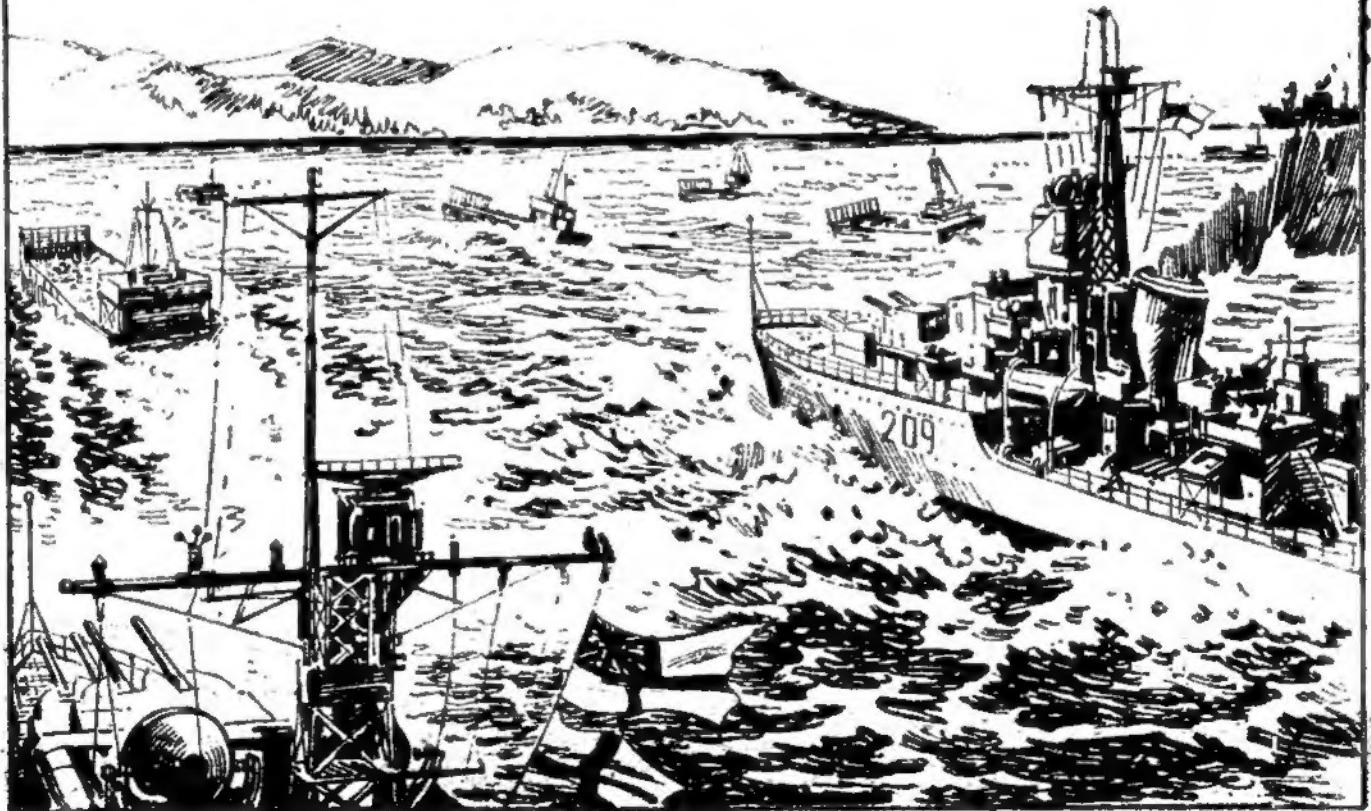
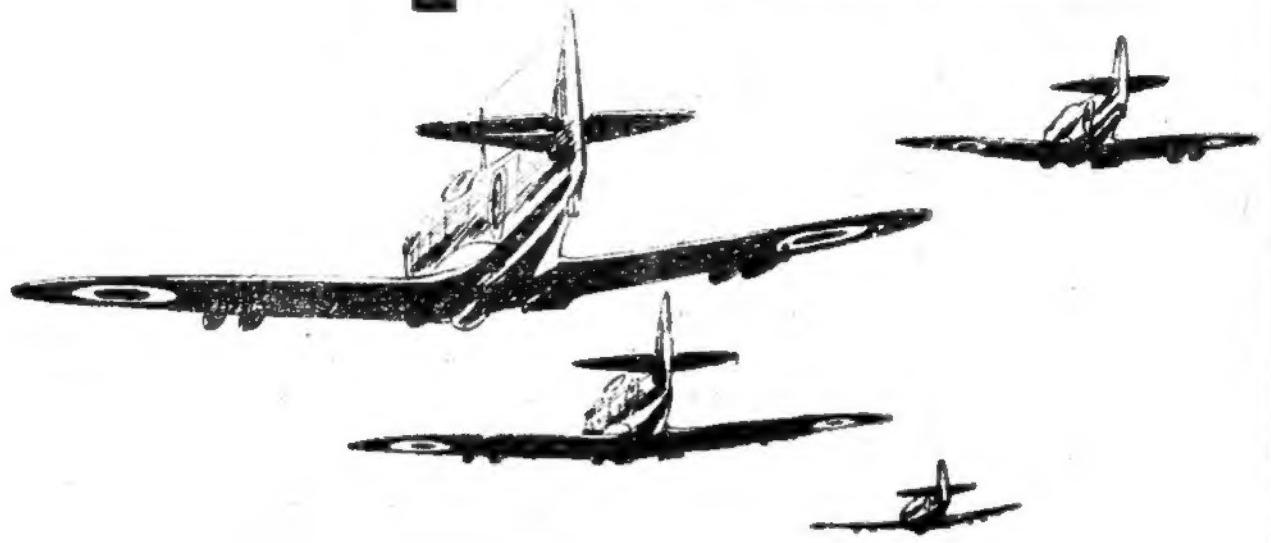
Next month's two exciting issues, which will be on sale Monday, 20th April, are :

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Chapter 1. THREE MEN IN A BOAT

BY THE SPRING OF 1943, NORTH AFRICA HAD BEEN CLEARED OF THE AXIS FORCES BY THE GALLANT EIGHTH ARMY. ROMMEL'S ONCE-GLORIOUS AFRIKA KORPS WAS A SULLEN RABBLE BEHIND BARBED WIRE.



OVER THE DESERT, AN EERIE SILENCE HAD FALLEN. HERE, WHERE GREAT ARMIES HAD FOUGHT FOR EVERY BLOODSTAINED YARD OF ARID SOIL, THE SAND NOW DRIFTED OVER THE WRECKED TANKS AND SMASHED GUNS, THE IRON FLOTSAM LEFT BY THE RECEDING TIDE OF WAR.



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BUT EUROPE STILL LAY HELPLESS UNDER THE NAZI JACKBOOT. THE BATTLE MUST GO ON. ALREADY IN PORT SAID, THE VICTORIOUS EIGHTH ARMY WAS EMBARKING FOR THE ATTACK ON THE SOFT UNDER-BELLY OF HITLER'S EUROPEAN STRONGHOLD.



WATCHING THE HEAVILY-LADEN VETERANS CLIMB THE GANGWAY TO THE DECK OF THE PATHAN WERE THREE MEN... A SAILOR, AN AIRMAN AND A SOLDIER...

THEY'RE A TOUGH-LOOKING BUNCH, BY GUM! I WOULDN'T FANCY FIGHTING THEM, WOULD YOU, MATE?

I WOULDN'T FANCY FIGHTING ANYONE, CHUM! A NON-COMBATANT, THAT'S ME!



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AIRCRAFTMAN GEORDIE WALKER WAS A FITTER... THE HEROIC PILOTS OF THE R.A.F. PUT THEIR LIVES IN GRIMY HANDS LIKE HIS EVERY TIME THEY TOOK A PLANE OFF THE GROUND, BUT GEORDIE MADE NO CLAIM TO BE A HERO. NEITHER DID STEWARD HILL OF THE ROYAL NAVY...



THE CHEERFUL VOICES OF JOE AND GEORDIE SEEMED TO STING THE BURLY SOLDIER WHO HAD BEEN GLUMLY WATCHING THE FIGHTING MEN COME ABOARD.



SAPPER BULLER OF THE ROYAL ENGINEERS HAD AN OLD GRIEVANCE...

ROYAL ENGINEERS! BULLER'S THE NAME. BUILDING RUDDY BRIDGES, LAYING ROADS, DIGGING DRAINS, THAT'S ALL I'VE DONE SINCE THEY POSTED ME! AND IT'LL BE THE SAME WHEN WE GET TO... WHEREVER THEY'RE SENDING US THIS TIME!



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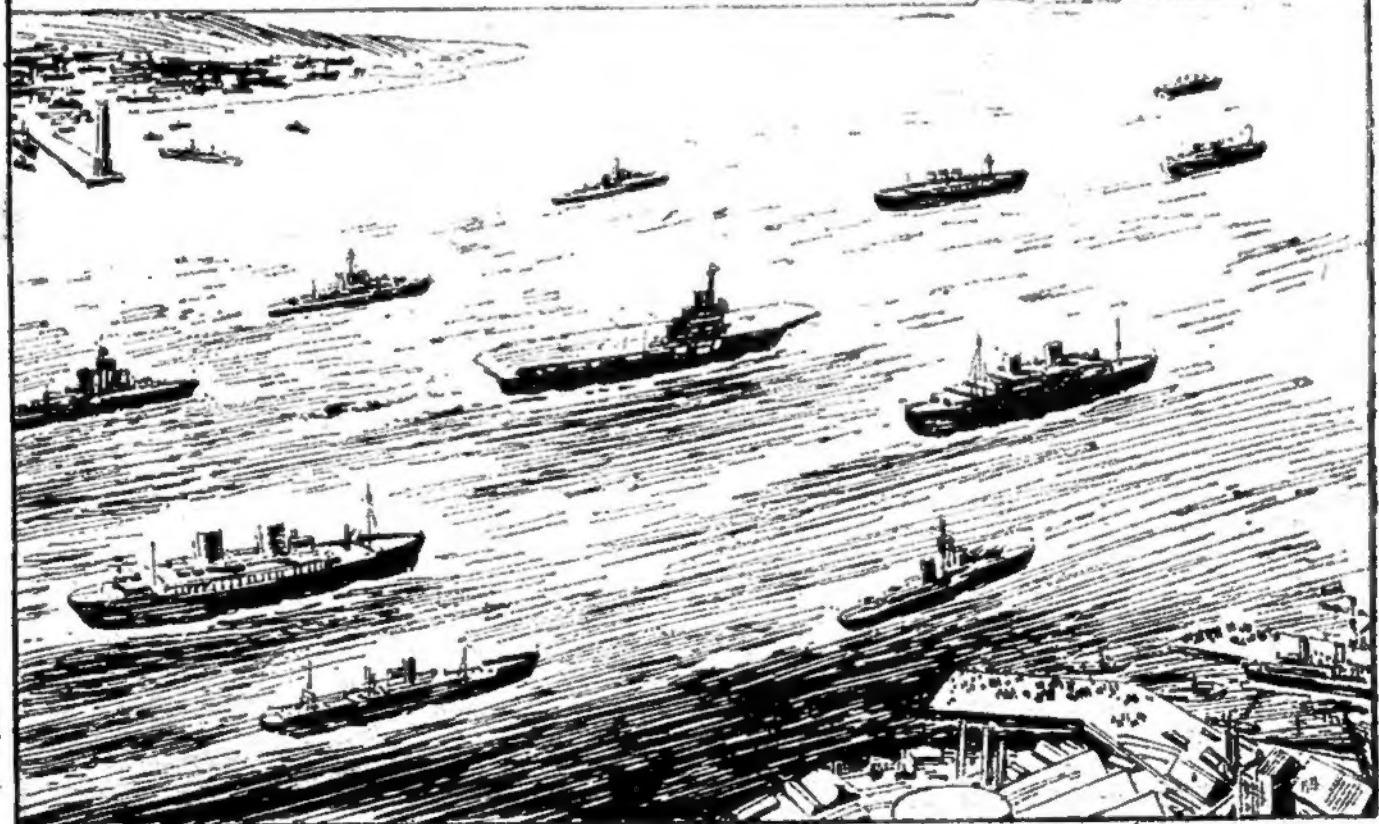
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WHILE THE THREE MEN HAD BEEN TALKING, THE LAST SOLDIER HAD CLIMBED THE GANGPLANK. THE PATHAN WAS READY TO SAIL WITH THE REST OF THE INVASION FLEET... TO A DESTINATION WHICH WAS STILL SECRET!

THAT'S AN IDEA, MATE!
WHERE **ARE** WE GOING?
I THINK I'LL GO
BELOW AND GET THE
BUZZ FROM THE
WARDROOM!



OUT INTO THE MEDITERRANEAN PLOUGHED THE TROOPSHIPS AND THEIR WHIPPET-LIKE ESCORTS. THEIR NEXT LANDFALL WOULD BE A VIOLENT ONE FOR HITLER'S ARROGANT ARMY!



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ALL DAY THE SHIPS HEADED NORTHWARD. IN THE FIRST DOG WATCH, SAPPER BULLER AND AIRCRAFTMAN WALKER SAW A LANKY FIGURE WALKING PURPOSEFULLY ACROSS THE TROOP-DECK OF THE PATHAN...



CURIOUS, GEORDIE AND THE BURLY SAPPER WATCHED THE NAVAL STEWARD DISAPPEAR BEHIND A LIFEBOAT SLUNG ON ITS DAVITS. WHEN THEY FOLLOWED HIM...

WOTCHER, MATES!
I GOT THE BUZZ ALL RIGHT...
WE'RE HEADING FOR SICILY!
I RECKON THE JERRIES WILL
BE HOPPING MAD WHEN THEY
SPOT US, AND A CARLEY FLOAT
IS ONE OF THE BEST THINGS
TO BE NEAR IF THIS OLD
TUB STOPS A PACKET!



Combined Operation

DIRECTLY THE CONVOY HAD REACHED THE OPEN SEA, THE OFFICERS WERE CALLED TO THE WARDROOM OF EACH TROOPSHIP. THERE, THE CAREFULLY-GUARDED SECRET OF THE INVASION FLEET'S DESTINATION WAS REVEALED . . .

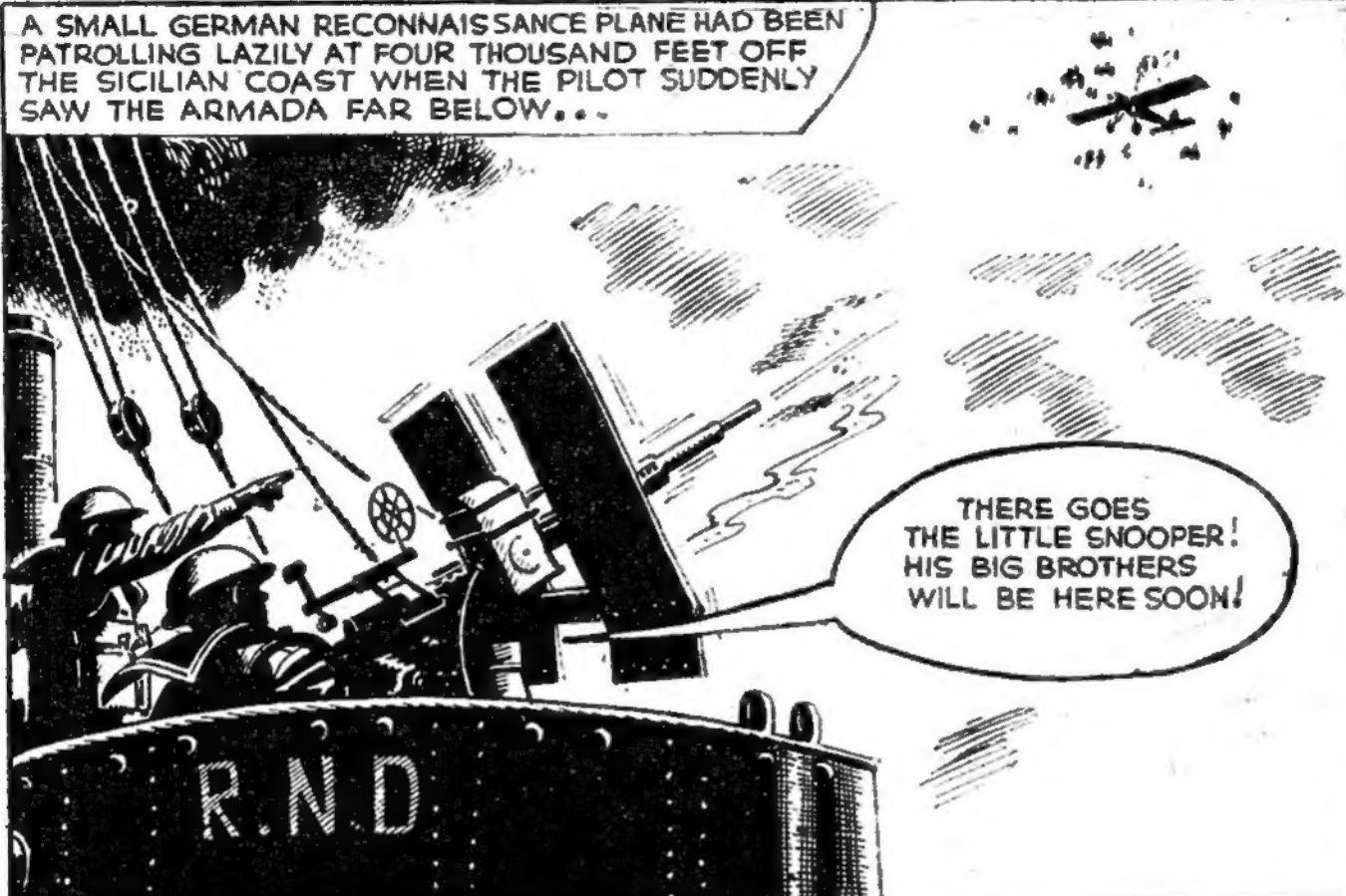


HIDDEN FROM BAWLING NON-COMS, READY ON THE CARLEY FLOAT FOR ANY
EMERGENCY, THE THREE NEW-FOUND FRIENDS PASSED THE VOYAGE IN PERFECT
PEACE. BUT ON THE AFTERNOON OF THE FIFTH DAY . . .



Combined Operation

A SMALL GERMAN RECONNAISSANCE PLANE HAD BEEN PATROLLING LAZILY AT FOUR THOUSAND FEET OFF THE SICILIAN COAST WHEN THE PILOT SUDDENLY SAW THE ARMADA FAR BELOW...



THERE GOES
THE LITTLE SNOOPER!
HIS BIG BROTHERS
WILL BE HERE SOON!

R.N.D.

AS IT BANKED AWAY, THE GUNS OF THE ESCORT DESTROYERS GRODED AFTER THE TINY GERMAN PLANE WITH VICIOUS ACCURACY. THE PILOT CALLED BASE EXCITEDLY...

ACHTUNG!
ACHTUNG! BLACK
ZERO TO BASE! ENEMY
FLEET APPROACHING COAST
FROM SOUTH-EAST! I WILL
GIVE APPROXIMATE
POSITION...



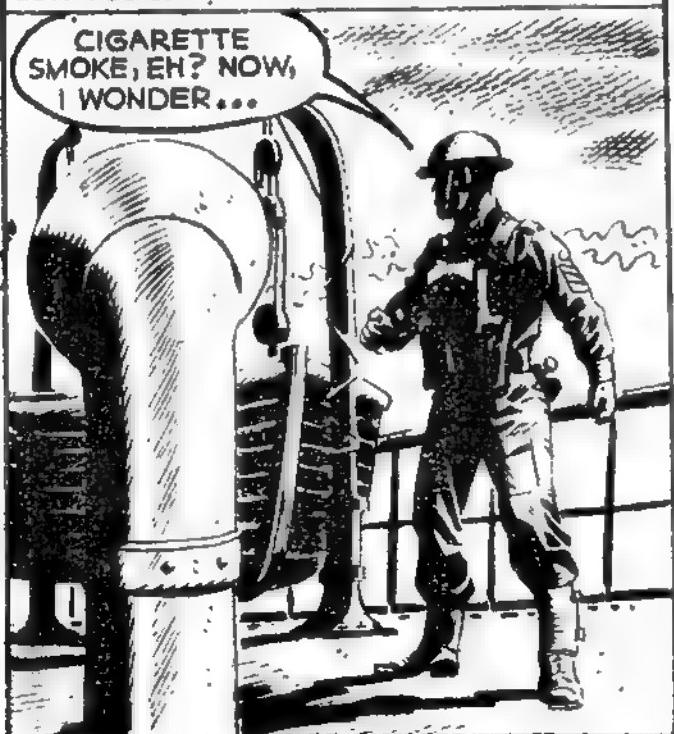
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THE MESSAGE SPARKED OFF FEVERISH ACTIVITY ON THE GERMAN AIRFIELD AT SAMENTO, SIXTY MILES AWAY IN SICILY. THIRTY MINUTES LATER, SIX HEINKEL III BOMBERS ROARED OFF THE RUNWAY, EACH CARRYING TWO TORPEDOES.



THE ENEMY PLANES HEADED OUT TO SEA IN ATTACK FORMATION. MEANWHILE, ON THE TROOP DECK OF THE PATHAN, SERGEANT TOM MASKELL OF THE DURHAM LIGHT INFANTRY WAS LOOKING CURIOUSLY AT A WISP OF SMOKE ...



EVEN AS THE TOUGH YOUNG SERGEANT MOVED FORWARD TO INVESTIGATE, THE BRITISH FLEET WAS BEING GREEDILY WATCHED BY HOSTILE EYES FROM THE HORIZON ...



Combined Operation

BUT GEORDIE, JOE AND BULL HAD OTHER THINGS TO WORRY ABOUT! THE LOOK ON SERGEANT TOM MASKELL'S FACE WAS CHILLING!



THE SERGEANT WAS A FEARSOME SIGHT TO THE GUILTY TRIO, BUT EVEN NOW A MORE DEADLY DANGER WAS THREATENING FROM THE PEACEFUL SUNSET SKY...

ACHTUNG! EACH WILL
ATTACK ONE TROOPSHIP!
THE ONE IN THE STARBOARD
VAN IS MINE!
HEIL HITLER!



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THE SHIP SELECTED AS A TARGET BY THE LUFTWAFFE
FLIGHT LEADER WAS NONE OTHER THAN THE PATHAN!
BUT ON ITS TROOP-DECK, THE SERGEANT WAS STILL
PREOCCUPIED WITH A LITTLE MATTER OF DISCIPLINE!

COME ON,
YOU SLACKERS!
THE HOLIDAY CRUISE
IS OVER!

YOU'RE
TELLING US,
SARGE! LOOK AT
THAT!



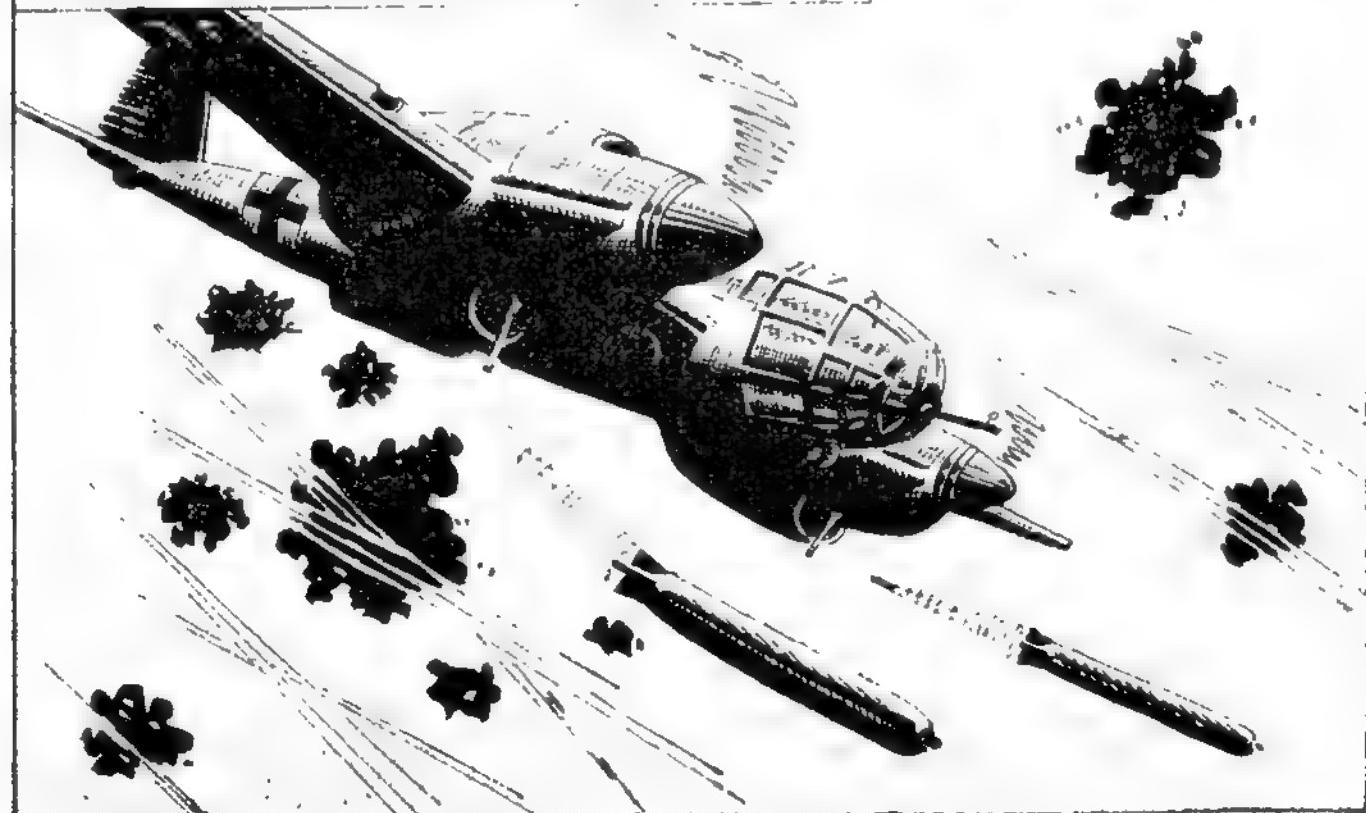
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THE THUNDEROUS ROAR OF AERO ENGINES UNDER STRESS AND THE ANSWERING BARRAGE OF FLAK RIVETED THE ATTENTION OF THE FOUR MEN. THEY LOOKED UP, AND TENSED . . .

IT'S COMING STRAIGHT FOR US!



ALONE OF THE SIX ENEMY BOMBERS, THE LEADER WAS PRESSING HOME HIS ATTACK IN THE FACE OF VICIOUS ACK-ACK FIRE. THE HEINKEL HEADED STRAIGHT FOR THE PATHAN AT CLOSE RANGE . . .



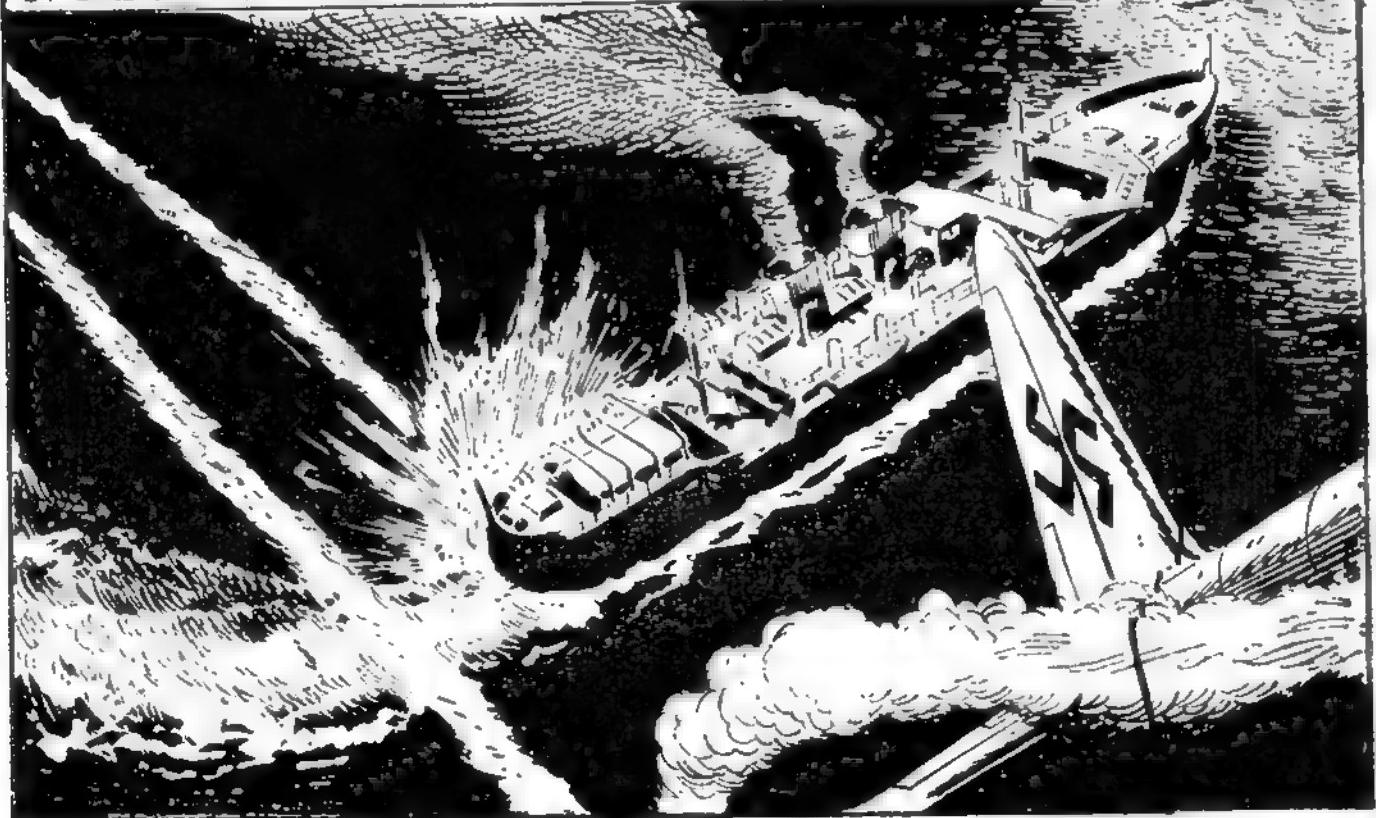
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THE TORPEDOES LANDED DOWN INTO THE SEA AND RAN TRUE. IN THE WHEELHOUSE OF THE TROOPSHIP THEY SAW THOSE TWO DEADLY ARROWS OF FOAM WHIPPING TOWARDS THEM . . .



UNDER FULL HELM, THE PATHAN HEELED TO PORT. ONE TORPEDO HISSED ACROSS HER WAKE EVEN AS THE HEINKEL SWEEPED OVER THE SHIP AND WAS BRACKETED BY SHELLFIRE! THE OTHER TORPEDO STRUCK HOME AT THE STERN . . .



Combined Operation

THE SUDDEN LURCH OF THE PATHAN HAD FLUNG THE CARLEY FLOAT AGAINST THE ROPES WHICH LASHED IT TO THE SHIP'S RAIL. THE JARRING SHOCK AS THE TORPEDO STRUCK PUT TOO GREAT A STRAIN ON THE SALT-WEAKENED HEMP...



THE FLOAT HUNG FOR ONE AGONISING MOMENT OVER THE DARKENING SEA. THEN...



SERGEANT TOM MASKELL HAD BEEN FLUNG INTO THE SEA AT THE FIRST SHOCK. BULLER, UNBALANCED BY HIS EFFORT TO AVOID THE FLAILING ROPES, FOLLOWED HIM. ONLY JOE AND GEORDIE CLUNG TO THE FLOAT AS IT HIT THE ICY WATER.



OKAY, BULL!
WE'RE COMING
FOR YOU!
SERGEANTS
FIRST!

THE TWO SOLDIERS WERE DRAGGED PAINFULLY ON TO THE FLOAT, ONLY THEN DID THE FOUR MEN LOOK BACK TOWARDS THE TROOPSHIP AND THE DESTROYERS HURRYING TO THE SCENE.

DAMAGE IS ONLY SUPERFICIAL,
COMMANDER! OUR BULKHEADS WILL
HOLD LONG ENOUGH FOR US TO
LAND THE TROOPS AS PLANNED
TOMORROW! THERE ARE
NO CASUALTIES!

THAT'S
WHAT HE
THINKS!



Combined Operation

THE PATHAN HAD SURVIVED THE ATTACK! THE MEN ON THE CARLEY FLOAT LISTENED CHEERFULLY TO THE VOICE COMING FROM THE LOUD HAULER... BUT A SUDDEN UNEASINESS GRIPPED THEM AS THE DESTROYER TURNED AWAY...

GOOD SHOW,
PATHAN! RESUME
STATION!

HI, NAVY!
HI! THEY'RE NOT
GOING TO SEE US!
FOR PETE'S SAKE,
NAVY!

SILENT AND OBLIVIOUS NOW, THE DESTROYER SURGED OFF INTO THE GATHERING DARKNESS. UNSEEN, THE TINY FLOAT PITCHED IN THE HEAVING WASTE OF WATERS...

Chapter 2.

HOSTILE ISLAND

THE BITTERNESS AND CHILLING FEAR OF THE MEN ON THE FLOAT INEVITABLY TURNED TO ANGER, AND STEWARD JOE HILL WAS THE TARGET...

WE'VE HAD IT! THEY'LL NEVER PICK US UP NOW! IT'S ALL YOUR FAULT, JOE; YOU AND YOUR ROTTEN CARLEY FLOAT!

HOW COULD I KNOW IT'D PITCH OVERBOARD?

BUT THE RASPING VOICE OF SERGEANT TOM MASKELL SILENCED THEM. THE VETERAN OF A TOUGH DESERT CAMPAIGN WAS NOT GOING TO GIVE UP WITHOUT A STRUGGLE!

SAVE YOUR BREATH, MEN! IF ANYBODY'S GOT A GROUSE IT'S ME! BUT I'M NOT GOING TO LET YOU LAZY SHIRKERS THROW MY LIFE AWAY WITH YOUR OWN!

THE SERGEANT'S PLAN WAS TO MANHANDLE THE FLOAT BACK TOWARDS THE CONVOY. BUT JOE HILL, PALE-FACED YET ODDLY DETERMINED, OBJECTED...

IT'S NO USE, SERGEANT! THE TIDE'S MAKING FOR THE COAST AND WE'D NEVER PADDLE THIS BLOOMIN' CORK AGAINST IT! WE'D BEST SAVE OUR STRENGTH AND LET THE SEA TAKE US INSHORE!

Combined Operation

THERE WAS A KIND OF DIGNITY ABOUT THE LANKY STEWARD IN THIS DESPERATE MOMENT. THIS WAS A JOB FOR THE NAVY, AND JOE HILL WAS A NAVY MAN.

LET'S HOPE YOU KNOW WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT, SAILOR! I DON'T TRUST ANY OF YOU RUDDY HEROES, BUT I SUPPOSE WE'D BETTER LET THE NAVY COMMAND THIS HERE CRAFT! WHAT'S YOUR NAME?



JOE HILL,
SERGEANT. STEWARD
HILL! I KNOW MORE
ABOUT BREWING TEA THAN
NAVIGATING, BUT I WON'T
LET THE NAVY DOWN IF
I CAN HELP IT!

ALL THROUGH THAT LONG AND STORMY NIGHT, WHILE THE OTHERS HUDDLED TOGETHER FOR WARMTH ON THEIR FRAIL CRAFT, JOE HILL KEPT WATCH.



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AND AS THE FIRST LIGHT OF DAWN STREAKED THE SKY, THE WEARY JOE LOOKED TOWARD THE EAST...

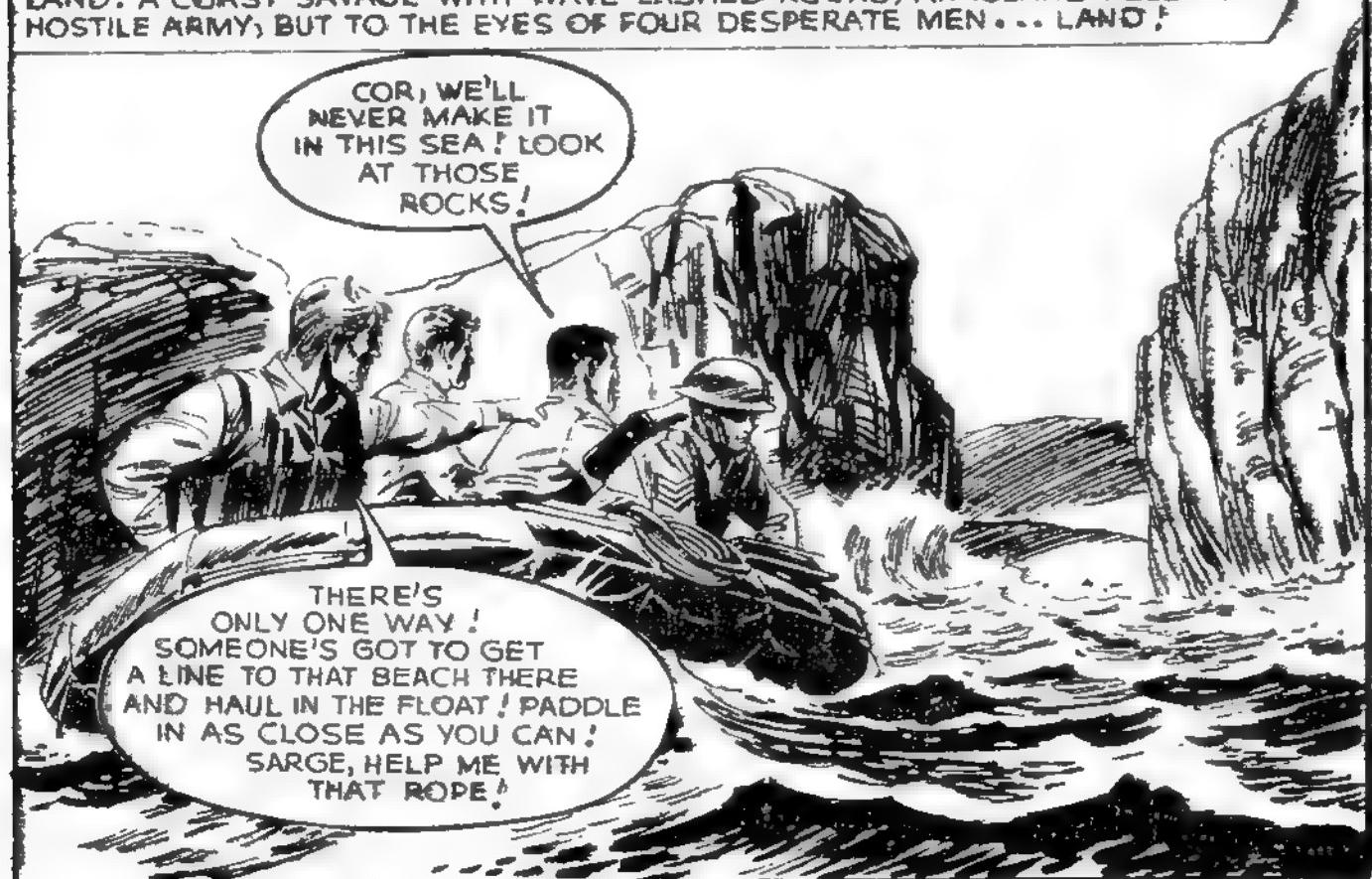
LAND!
BY CRIKEY! WE'RE
GOING TO MAKE
IT! SARGE, HEY,
SARGE !



LAND! A COAST SAVAGE WITH WAVE-LASHED ROCKS; AN ISLAND HELD BY A HOSTILE ARMY; BUT TO THE EYES OF FOUR DESPERATE MEN... LAND!

COR, WE'LL NEVER MAKE IT IN THIS SEA! LOOK AT THOSE ROCKS!

THERE'S ONLY ONE WAY!
SOMEONE'S GOT TO GET
A LINE TO THAT BEACH THERE
AND HAUL IN THE FLOAT! PADDLE
IN AS CLOSE AS YOU CAN!
SARGE, HELP ME WITH
THAT ROPE!



Combined Operation



WITH ALL HIS REMAINING STRENGTH, JOE HILL HAULED ON THE ROPE. SLOWLY, BUFFETED BY THE RAVENING SEA, THE CLUMSY FLOAT EDGED IN BETWEEN THE ROCKS . . .

HOLD HER, MEN,
HOLD HER!



AT THE LAST MOMENT, CAUGHT BY THE VICIOUS UNDERTOW, THE FLOAT CAPSIZED . . . BUT THE SHORE WAS WITHIN REACH!



Combined Operation

SERGEANT TOM MASKELL PULLED HIMSELF OUT OF THE RAGING SURF AND LOOKED AT JOE HILL. THERE WAS A NOTE OF RESPECT IN THE VETERAN'S VOICE WHEN HE SPOKE.



THE NAVY HAD DONE IT'S JOB... NOW THE SERGEANT TOOK OVER. AS THE HOT SICILIAN SUN ROSE ABOVE THE PARCHED AND HOSTILE ISLAND...



THE FOUR MEN SCRAMBLED UNEASILY FOR THE COVER OF A GROVE OF OLIVE TREES, AND PAUSED...

WELL, THIS IS SICILY! I RECKON OUR TROOPS WILL HAVE LANDED ALREADY SOMEWHERE ALONG THIS COAST, BUT I HAVEN'T A CLUE WHICH WAY THAT WOULD BE. HAVE YOU JOE?

I HAD A DEKKO AT THE COLONEL'S MAP IN THE PATHAN'S WARDROOM. THE LANDINGS WERE AIMED SOUTH OF SYRACUSE AND THE TIDE WAS SETTING NORTH IN THE NIGHT. THAT WOULD PUT US BETWEEN SYRACUSE AND THE INVASION BEACHES!

THE SERGEANT MEANT TO REJOIN THE BRITISH FORCES, EVEN IF IT MEANT FIGHTING HIS WAY THROUGH A GERMAN ARMY WITH THREE UNARMED NON-COMBATANTS AT HIS SIDE!

ALL RIGHT, SO WE HEAD SOUTH AND TRY TO REACH OUR OWN FORCES! REMEMBER, WE'VE GOT HALF A GERMAN ARMY TO GET THROUGH! I KNOW YOU MEN ARE ALL NON-COMBATANTS, BUT YOU MAY HAVE TO DO SOME FIGHTING NOW! ARE YOU GAME?

'COURSE WE ARE! NO ONE EVER GAVE US A CHANCE TO FIGHT BEFORE, THAT'S ALL.

Combined Operation

AS THE SMALL AND RAGGED PARTY SET OFF ON THEIR DESPERATE JOURNEY, SAPPER BULLER VIEWED THE PROSPECT OF A FIGHT WITH A RELISH WHICH LITTLE GEORDIE WALKER DID NOT SHARE!



Combined Operation

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THE THROBBING ROAR OF AIRCRAFT ENGINES LED THE FOUR DESPERATE MEN TO THE EDGE OF THE OLIVE GROVE. WARILY THEY PEERED OUT...



HUDDLING BACK IN THE SHELTER OF THE TREES, THE MEN TURNED INSTINCTIVELY TO AIRCRAFTMAN GEORDIE WALKER, A GERMAN AIRFIELD... THIS WAS WHERE THE R.A.F. TOOK OVER!



Combined Operation



WITH A VELL FROM THE SERGEANT, THE NON-COMBATANTS ARMY FLUNG ITSELF AT THE GERMAN GUARDS... ALL EXCEPT GEORDIE WALKER! FOR GEORDIE SUDDENLY HAD A PLAN OF HIS OWN!

KNOCK THEM DOWN, MEN!

COR! THAT'S AN IDEA!



TWO OF THE GERMAN GUARDS, CAUGHT UNAWARES, CRUMPLED UNDER THE SAVAGE ATTACK OF THE SERGEANT AND THE EXULTANT SAPPER.

THIS IS WHAT I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR, JERRY!



Combined Operation

JOE HILL FLAILED INTO THE THIRD GERMAN BEFORE HE COULD USE HIS GUN.
THE THREE MAN FIGHTING FORCE HAD WON ITS FIRST BATTLE... AND THE
FOURTH MAN WAS BUSY ON HIS OWN!



QUICKLY, THE THREE GUARDS WERE DRAGGED INTO THE SHELTER OF THE OLIVE GROVE. THE GERMAN RIFLES AND AUTOMATICS CHANGED HANDS...



Combined Operation

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THE THREE PAIRS OF EYES WHICH MET GEORDIE WALKER AS HE PLUNGED PANTING INTO THE WOOD WERE COLD AND ACCUSING ...



THE LITTLE AIRCRAFTMAN FACED THEM DEFIANTLY. FOR SOME REASON, HE WANTED THEM TO STAY AND WATCH THE AIRFIELD. BUT SERGEANT MASKELL WAS IN A HURRY ...

WE CAN'T HANG AROUND HERE! COME ON!

OH LUMME,
I WANTED
TO SEE
THIS!



Combined Operation

THE FOUR MEN LEFT THE SHELTER OF THE TREES AND BEGAN TO CLIMB. RELUCTANT STILL, GEORDIE WALKER LOOKED BACK . . .

WAIT, SARGE! LOOK DOWN THERE!



WITH A SHATTERING ROAR, THE FIRST THREE MESSERSCHMITTS TOOK OFF IN TIGHT FORMATION. BUT THE WATCHERS ON THE HILLSIDE SUDDENLY SAW THAT SOMETHING WAS WRONG WITH THE ENEMY FIGHTERS!

LOOK AT THAT PLANE! THE PILOT MUST HAVE GONE CRAZY!

NO HE HASN'T, MATE! HE'S JUST FLIPPING CROSS BECAUSE HE CAN'T RETRACT HIS UNDERCARRIAGE!



Combined Operation

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THE WHEELS WOULD NOT RETRACT! IN THE COCKPIT OF THE LEADING MESSERSCHMITT, SOMETHING LIKE PANIC CAUGHT THE NAZI PILOT AS HE THREW HIS PLANE ABOUT IN AN EFFORT TO FREE THE LOCKED HYDRAULIC SYSTEM.



FOR ONE FATAL MOMENT, THE PILOT FORGOT THE AIRCRAFT FLYING WITHIN INCHES OF HIS OWN. IN THAT MOMENT THE TWO WINGS TOUCHED ...



Combined Operation

OUT OF CONTROL, THE TWO SLEEK FIGHTERS BECAME CRAZY BROKEN WRECKS IN THE SKY! AND ON THE GROUND, SERGEANT TOM MASKELL LOOKED THOUGHTFULLY AT THE GRINNING GEORDIE!

GEORDIE, MY LAD, WHAT EXACTLY WERE YOU UP TO ON THAT AIRFIELD WHILE WE WERE SCRAPPING?

MORE PLANES COMING.

I TOLD YOU, SARGE. USING MY LOAF! AND RAMMING LUMPS OF WOOD INTO THE HYDRAULIC SYSTEMS OF THOSE MESSERSCHMITTS!

THE LITTLE R.A.F. FITTER GRINNED... HE HAD NOT BEEN IDLE DURING THAT BRIEF FIGHT ON THE AIRFIELD...

BUT WHAT WAS THE POINT OF DOING THAT, GEORDIE? EVEN IF THEY CAN'T GET THEIR WHEELS UP, THEY CAN STILL FIGHT!

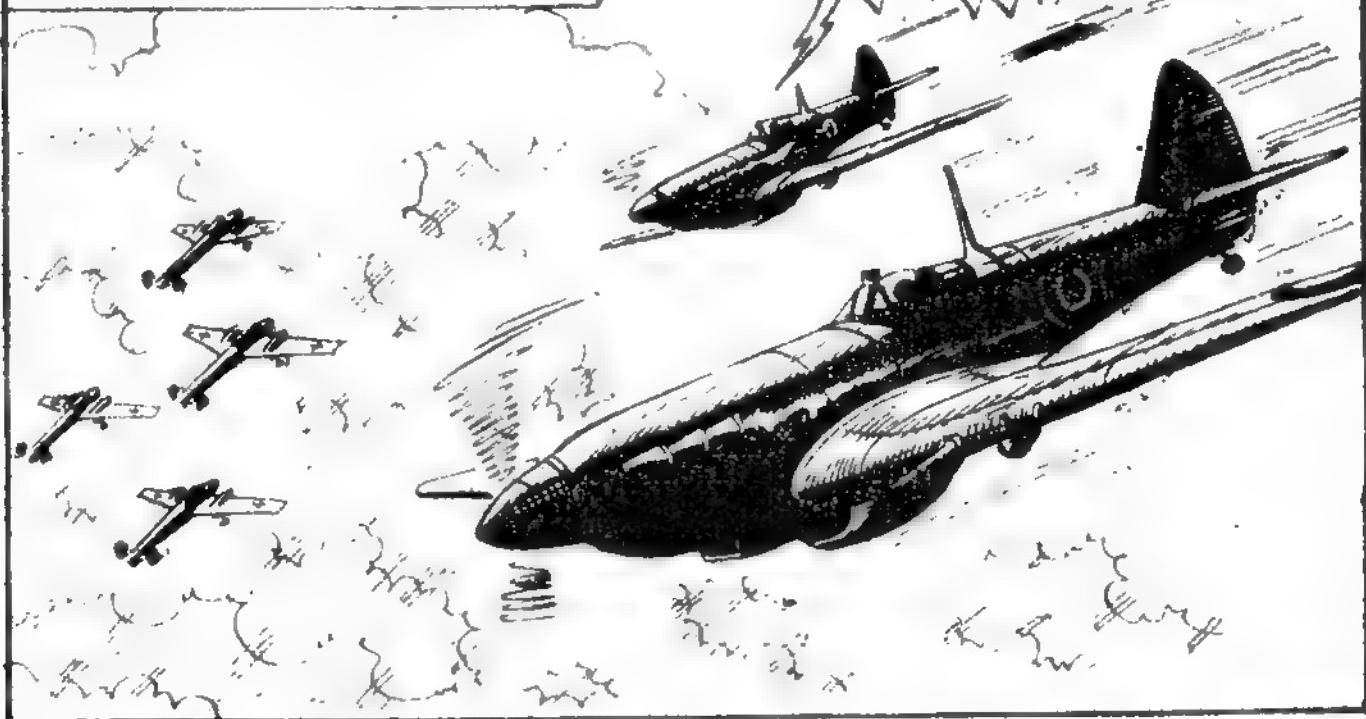
CAN THEY, MATE? YOU JUST WATCH THOSE SPITFIRES!

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THE WOODEN STAKES HE HAD RAMMED INTO THE HYDRAULIC SYSTEMS UNDER THE MESSERSCHMITTS' WINGS HAD STOPPED THE UNDERCARRIAGES RETRACTING... AND WITH WHEELS DOWN THE SPEED OF THE GERMAN FIGHTERS WAS DRASTICALLY CUT...

SOMETHING'S UP WITH THOSE JERRIES, PETER! THEIR WHEELS ARE STILL DOWN! FOUR SITTING DUCKS, OLD BOY! TALLY HO!



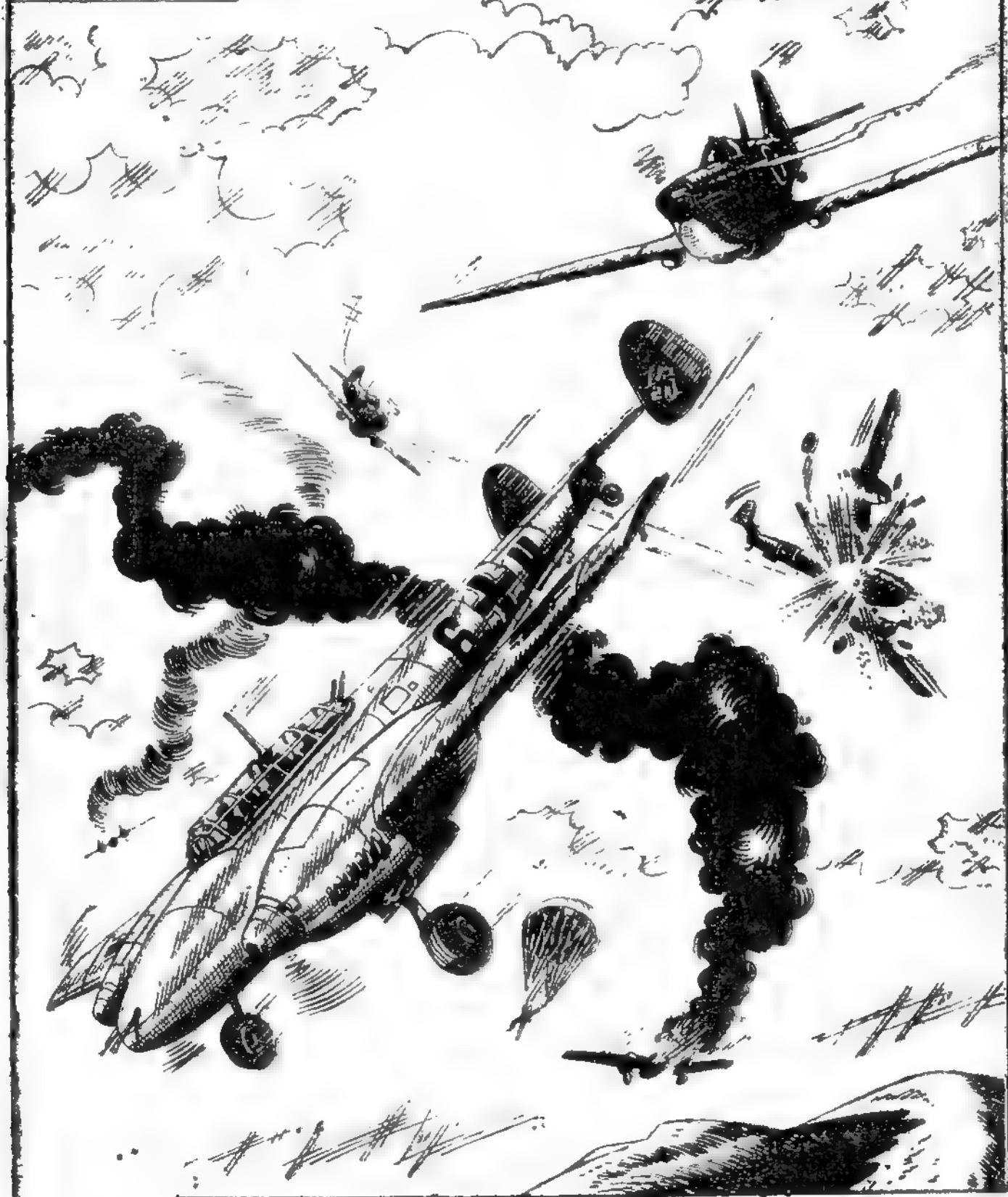
LIKE LETHAL BULLETS, THE TWO SPITFIRES SHOT VIOLENTLY DOWN ON THE SLUGGISH GERMAN FIGHTERS, COOL EYES WATCHED THE SIGHTS, COOL FINGERS PRESSED THE GUN BUTTONS...



SEE THAT, MATES! WITH THE DRAG OF THOSE WHEELS, THE JERRY PLANES ARE AS SLOW AS CARTHORSES!

Combined Operation

IT WAS A MASSACRE! IN THE FIRST SCREAMING POWER DIVE OF THE TWO BRITISH FIGHTERS, TWO MESSERSCHMITTS DISINTEGRATED UNDER A HAIL OF LEAD. A THIRD TRIED CLUMSILY AND VAINLY TO ESCAPE . . .



THE FOURTH MESSERSCHMITT BROKE AWAY FROM THE RELENTING BRITISH PILOTS. BUT AS IT CAME IN TO LAND, ITS DAMAGED WHEELS FOLDED LIKE PAPER UNDER IT!

GEORDIE, MY LAD, I TAKE BACK ALL I SAID! THAT'S SIX JERR PLANES YOU CAN CHALK UP — YOU'RE A RUDDY WAR ACE!

NOT ME, SARGE! THAT WAS JUST THE RAFF'S CONTRIBUTION TO THIS LITTLE PICNIC!

THE TOUGH YOUNG SERGEANT RELAXED BUT ONLY FOR A MOMENT. THERE WAS STILL A WHOLE GERMAN ARMY BETWEEN THE FOUR MEN AND SAFETY...

FOR NON-COMBATANTS, YOU BOYS AREN'T DOING BADLY! I FEEL A LOT BETTER WITH THIS BABY IN MY HANDS! COME ON!

*Chapter 3.***THE BRIDGE**

ARMED NOW, THE FOUR MEN MOVED ON ACROSS THE HARSH SICILIAN TERRAIN. ALL THAT DAY AND THE NEXT THEY KEPT GOING, BURNED BY THE TORRID SUN, THREATENED CONSTANTLY BY GERMAN PATROLS...

KEEP GOING, MEN!



ON THE THIRD DAY, AS THEY FOLLOWED A DUSTY ROAD SOUTHWARDS TOWARDS THE BRITISH BEACH-HEAD ...

TAKE COVER! JERRIES!



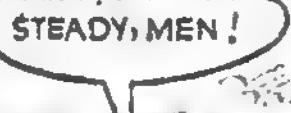
IT WAS THE FOURTH ALARM THAT MORNING. OBVIOUSLY THEY WERE NEARING THAT POINT OF SAFETY... AND OF DANGER... THE FRONT LINE !

WE MUST BE NEAR THE FRONT LINE WITH ALL THESE SQUAREHEADS ABOUT! LET'S GET MOVING AGAIN... AND TAKE IT CAREFULLY !

TRUST ME,
SARGE! I'LL WALK
ON TIPTOE !

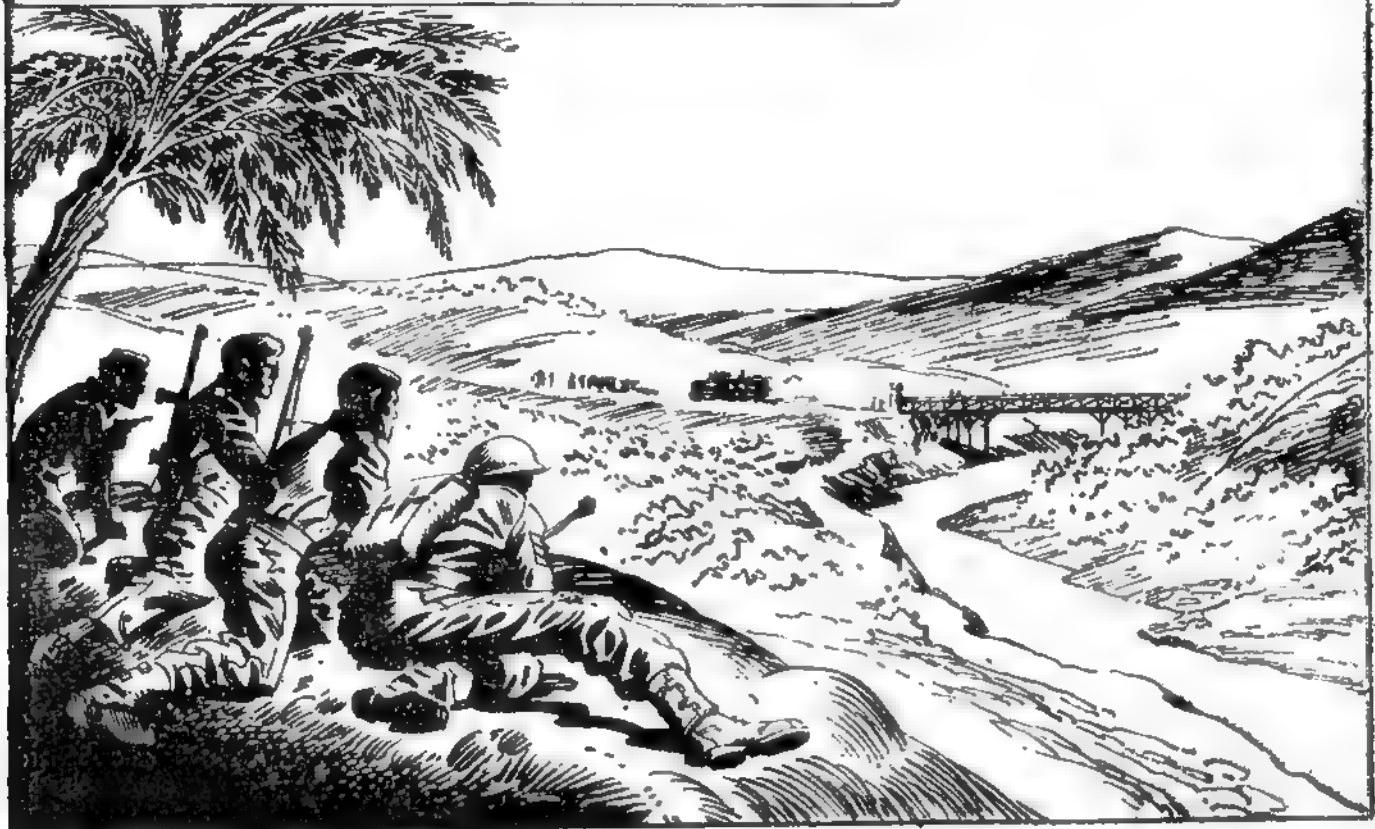
MOVING WITH EXTREME CAUTION NOW, THE WEARY LITTLE PARTY COVERED THREE MORE MILES. THEN, AT NOON, AS THEY APPROACHED THE CREST OF A ROCKY RIDGE...

STEADY, MEN !



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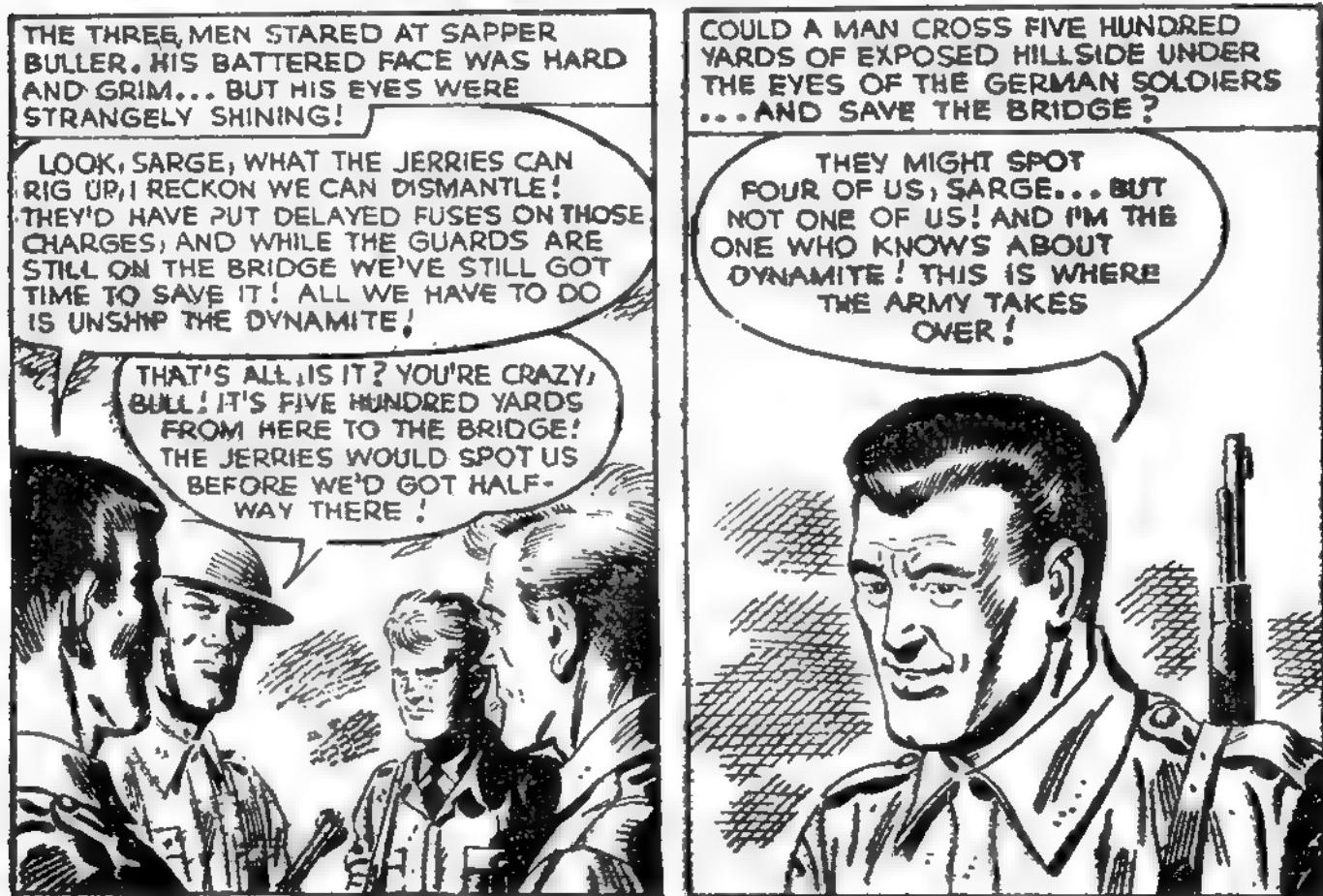
THE SERGEANT HAD SENSED THAT BEYOND THE RIDGE LAY DANGER... AND HE WAS RIGHT! IN THE RIVER VALLEY AHEAD, THE GERMANS WERE PREPARING FOR A FIGHT!



STEEL-HELMETED ENGINEERS SWARMED AROUND THE BRIDGE. A MACHINE-GUN DETACHMENT WAS TAKING UP POSITION IN THE STONY HILLS WHICH COMMANDDED THE RIVER CROSSING.

WELL, THIS IS IT, LADS! OUR TROOPS MUST BE APPROACHING ON THE FAR SIDE OF THAT RIVER... AND IT LOOKS AS THOUGH THE JERRIES ARE PREPARING A HOT LITTLE RECEPTION FOR THEM!

THOSE CHAPS DOWN BY THE BRIDGE, SARGE... I'LL BET THEY'VE BEEN LAYING CHARGES TO BLOW IT UP!



Combined Operation



ON THE BRIDGE, THE GERMAN GUARD GLANCED AT HIS WATCH.
NOT LONG NOW! HE WOULD BE GLAD TO GET OFF THIS DOOMED
BRIDGE AND ITS LOAD OF HIGH EXPLOSIVE . . .

"uh-huh"



BEHIND THE GERMAN'S BACK,
SAPPER BULLER HAD REACHED
THE RIVER BANK UNSEEN! NOW
CAME THE MOST DANGEROUS
PART OF HIS DEATH-
CHEATING MISSION!

GOOD-OH,
THEY'RE LASHED
WITH TWINE!
THANKS FOR THE
KNIFE, GEORDIE!

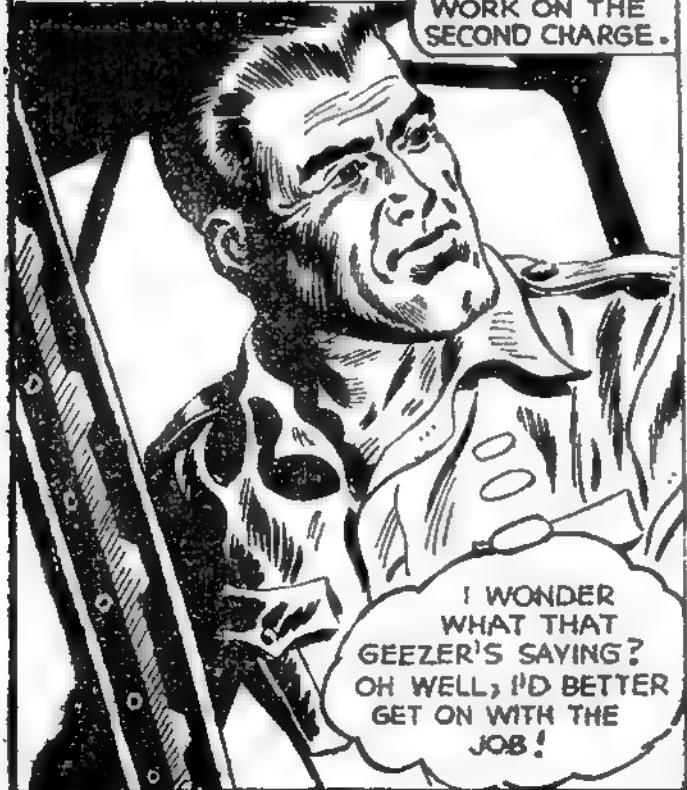


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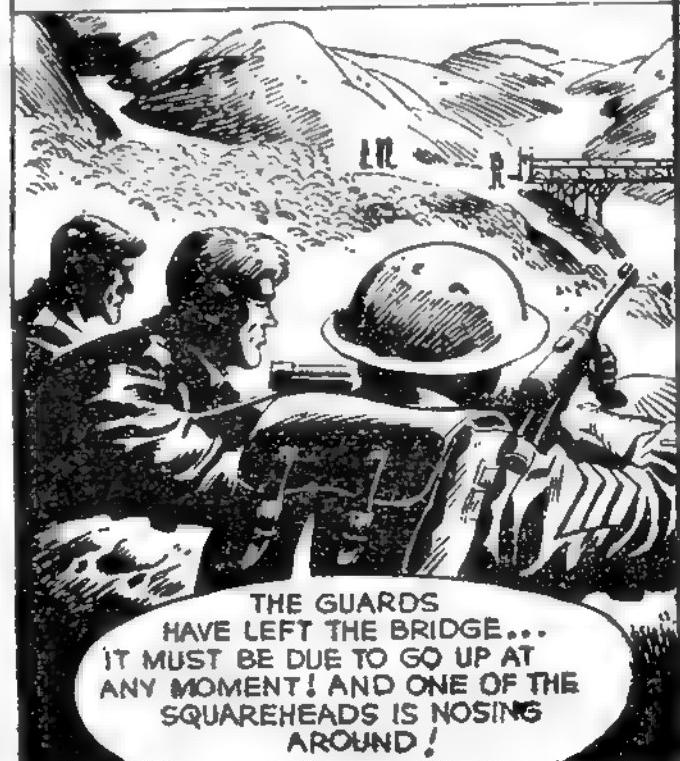
FOUR VICIOUS STROKES OF THE KNIFE, AND THE LASHINGS PARTED. THERE WAS NO TIME TO DE-FUSE THE CHARGE... THE WATER WOULD NEUTRALISE IT...



ABOVE BULL'S HEAD, A GRATING VOICE GAVE AN ORDER IN GERMAN. A VITAL ORDER... BUT IT MEANT NOTHING TO THE BURLY SAPPER. PHLEGMATICALLY HE SET TO WORK ON THE SECOND CHARGE.



ON THE RIDGE, THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE GERMAN'S MOVEMENTS HAD NOT BEEN LOST ON THE SERGEANT. BULL'S TIME WAS RUNNING OUT... AND NOW A NEW DANGER THREATENED...



Combined Operation

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ONE GERMAN SOLDIER HAD ORDERS TO PATROL THE RIVER BANK UPSTREAM OF THE BRIDGE. GRUMBLING, HE OBEYED... AND HEARD WITH SLUGGISH CURIOSITY A SOFT SPLASH IN THE WATER...



IT WAS THE THIRD CHARGE CUT LOOSE BY SAPPER BULLER! THE GERMAN HALF-TURNED, REACHING SLOWLY FOR HIS RIFLE. AND ABOVE, ON THE RIDGE...



SERGEANT TOM MASKELL DID NOT HESITATE. SOMEONE HAD TO GET THAT INQUISITIVE GUARD—AND SILENTLY—LIKE LIGHTNING—THE YOUNG VETERAN SLIPPED OVER THE CREST.



Combined Operation

ALREADY THE GUARD HAD SEEN THE BURLY SAPPER
UNDER THE BRIDGE. EYES GLISTENING, HE LIFTED HIS
RIFLE, BUT HE WAS SLOW . . . TOO SLOW . . .

ACHTUNG!
YOU UNDER
THE BRIDGE
THERE!



TWELVE STONE OF BRAWN AND MUSCLE HIT THE
GERMAN BEHIND THE KNEES IN A RUGBY-STYLE
TACKLE . . . HIS SMOTHERED YELL OF FEAR STARTLED
BULL, WHO HAD JUST CUT LOOSE THE FOURTH
CHARGE.



SENSING THAT TIME WAS SHORT, BULL SET TO WORK ON THE LAST CHARGE. AGONIZED GRUNTS AND THRESHING LIMBS IN THE WATER TOLD HIM THAT THE SERGEANT NEEDED NO HELP!

QUIET,
FRITZ! LET'S
KEEP YOUR FRIENDS
OUT OF THIS!



BUT THE KNIFE WAS GETTING BLUNT NOW. FRANTICALLY BULL SAWED AT THE LASHINGS. SWEAT POURED FROM HIS FACE. HOW MANY SECONDS HAD HE LEFT.

GET RID OF
THAT THING FOR PETE'S
SAKE, BULL! IT'S GOING
UP ANY SECOND!

IT'S THE
LAST ONE, SARGE!



Combined Operation

HALF A MILE AWAY, THE GERMAN SAPPER LIEUTENANT LOOKED AT HIS WATCH. TEN SECONDS TO GO... FIVE SECONDS... HIS NERVES TENSED FOR THE EXPLOSION...



THE BRIDGE HAD BEEN SAVED... BUT NEITHER BULL NOR THE SERGEANT WOULD EVER KNOW HOW CLOSE THEY HAD BEEN TO OBLITERATION!

GOOD WORK,
BULL! NOW LET'S
GET GOING BEFORE
THE JERRIES COME TO
FIND OUT WHY THE
BRIDGE IS STILL
STANDING!



Chapter 4.

A MAN'S WAR

THE TWO MEN BEGAN THEIR PERILOUS JOURNEY BACK FROM THE BRIDGE. BUT ALREADY THE GERMAN LIEUTENANT, WHITE WITH RAGE, WAS PREPARING TO INVESTIGATE !

THESE PIG DOGS HAVE BUNGLED THE CHARGES! THE BRIDGE IS STILL STANDING AND THE BRITISH WILL BE HERE WITHIN TEN MINUTES! HEINE... SCHMITT... FOLLOW ME !



SWIFTLY, THE SERGEANT AND THE SAPPER RAN FOR THE COVER OF THE HIGH ROCKS. THEY WERE STILL TWO HUNDRED YARDS AWAY WHEN A GERMAN VOICE RANG OUT TO THEIR RIGHT !

HERR
LEUTNANT!
TWO MEN OVER
THERE!



Combined Operation

THE THREE GERMANS TURNED AND BEGAN TO RUN. BULLETS SPAT AGAINST THE ROCKS AS THE SERGEANT DROPPED COOLLY TO HIS KNEE...

GET BACK TO THE OTHERS, BULL!
I'LL HOLD THIS LOT BACK!
GO ON, MAN!

BUT, SARGE...



THE TOUGH SERGEANT HAD BEEN IN TOO MANY TIGHT SPOTS BEFORE TO LOSE HIS HEAD. HE ORDERED BULL TO GO ON, AND THEN WAITED. SLOWLY, DELIBERATELY, HIS FINGER TENSED ON THE TRIGGER.

LOOK
OUT FOR THE
OFFICER,
SARGE!

UGH!



Combined Operation

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THAT ONE PRECISELY-AIMED BURST CUT DOWN THE TWO GERMAN SOLDIERS LIKE A SHARP SCYTHE! BUT THE OFFICER WAS STILL RUNNING AND FIRING. BULL, WHO HAD TURNED TO AID THE SERGEANT, WHIPPED UP HIS RIFLE . . .

GOT YOU!



BULL'S AIM WAS GOOD! THE OFFICER TWISTED IN THE AIR AND CRUMPLED. BUT THE GERMAN HAD HIT SERGEANT MASKELL WITH HIS LAST SHOT AND THE VETERAN WAS HELPLESS WITH PAIN. THE WATCHERS ON THE RIDGE SAW BULL KNEELING BESIDE THE WOUNDED SERGEANT.

SARGE
HAS BEEN HIT! I'M
GOING DOWN THERE!
STAY HERE,
GEORDIE!

OKAY,
MATE!



Combined Operation

GRITTING HIS TEETH, JOE HILL CLIMBED OVER THE CREST AND RAN TO HELP BULL.



BUT THE SHOTS HAD DRAWN THE ATTENTION OF THE GERMAN MACHINE GUNNERS ON THE NEARBY HILL. THE HARD VOICE OF THE CORPORAL CUT SHORT THEIR MOMENTARY PANIC. AT THE SAME MOMENT, FROM THE HILLS ON THE FAR SIDE OF THE RIVER...



THE BARK OF MORTAR FIRE FROM ACROSS THE RIVER TOLD THE FOUR DESPERATE MEN THAT THE BRITISH FORCES WERE MOPPING UP THE GERMAN REARGUARD.



LOOK, YOU RUDDY NON-COMBATANTS, IN CASE I PEG OUT BEFORE I GET A CHANCE TO TELL YOU, YOU'RE THE BIGGEST BUNCH OF HEROES THAT I HAVE EVER MET. LUCKILY THE BRITISH ARMY'S NOT FAR AWAY BY THE SOUND OF THAT GUNFIRE OVER THERE.

BUT THIS LAST HOUR WAS THE MOST DESPERATE! ALONG THE RIDGE, THE BLACK SNUOT OF THE GERMAN MACHINE GUN TURNED IN THEIR DIRECTION...



Combined Operation



BULL'S PLAN WAS AS FOOLHARDY AS ONLY AN AMATEUR'S COULD BE... BUT AT LEAST HE WAS RIGHT ABOUT THE GERMAN MACHINE GUN CORPORAL'S PLANS...

ON THE BRIDGE, CORPORAL! THE ENGLISH!

CEASE FIRE! TRAVERSE THE GUN ON THE BRIDGE ! THE SABOTEURS WILL BE TOO SCARED TO SHOW THEIR HEADS NOW.... IF THEY'RE STILL ALIVE !

AS THE BRITISH FORWARD PATROL SET FOOT ON THE BRIDGE BELOW, THE HAIL OF BULLETS ALONG THE RIDGE ABRUPTLY STOPPED. HEART BEATING, SAPPER BULLER GOT TO HIS FEET.

OUR CHAPS ARE DOWN THERE, SARGE... AND THE JERRIES HAVE STOPPED FIRING AT US.

OKAY, BULL! IT'S YOUR PARTY! I'VE GOT ONE GOOD ARM AND TWO LEGS... I'M COMING WITH YOU!

Combined Operation

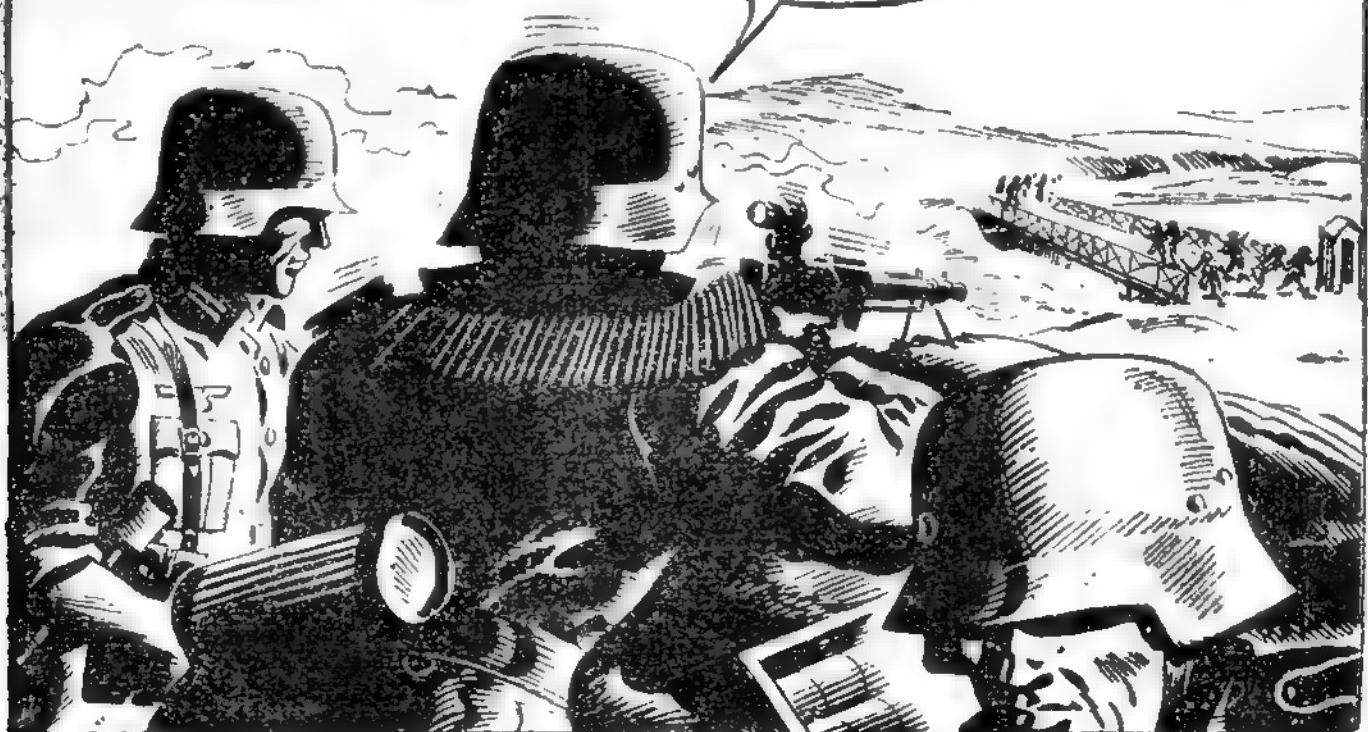
IN THAT BRIEF, EERIE SILENCE, THE FOUR MEN CREEP BACK ALONG THE RIDGE AND CROSSED THE ROAD. WEAK FROM LOSS OF BLOOD, THE SERGEANT LAGGED BEHIND . . .

YOU ALL RIGHT, SARGE?

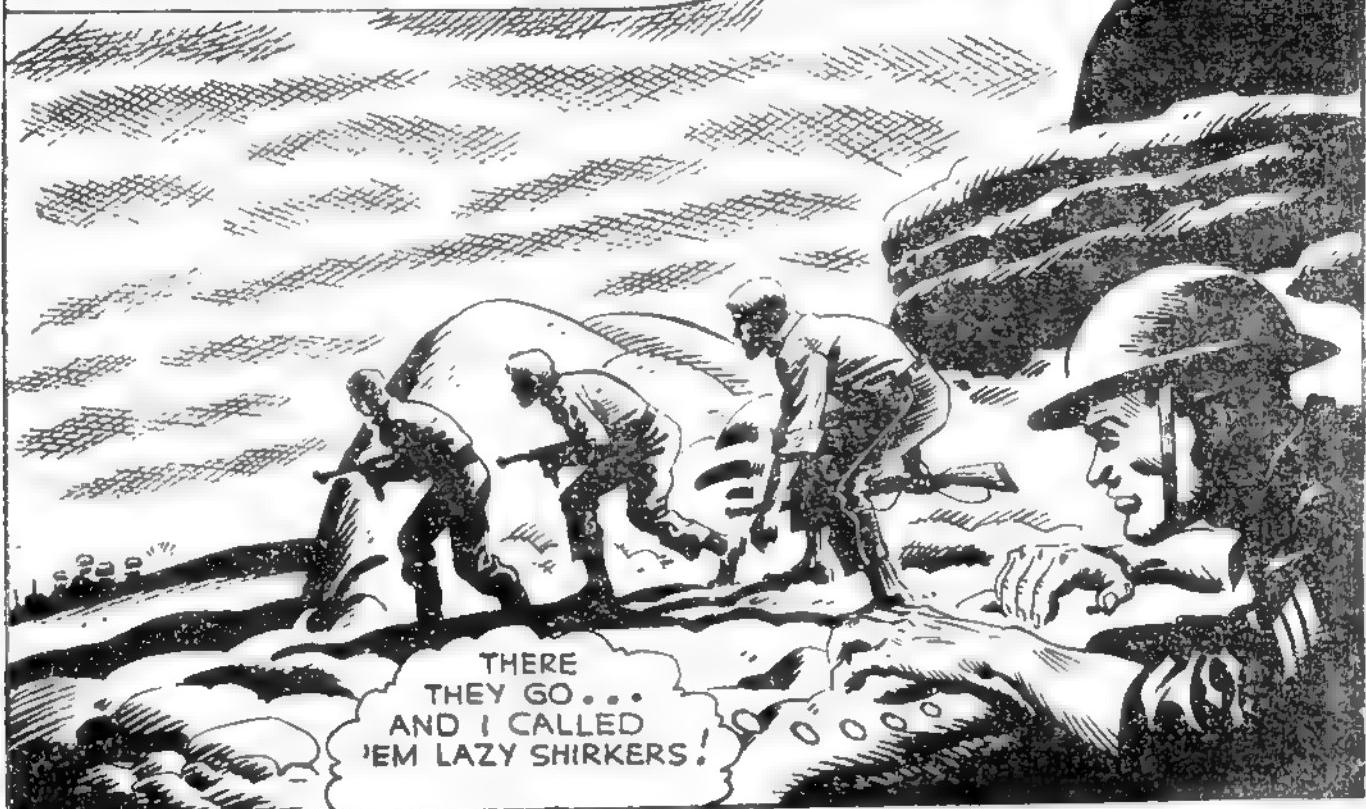
KEEP...
GOING! THAT
GUN HAS STARTED
UP... THERE ISN'T
MUCH TIME!

THE FIRST BRITISH TROOPS HAD REACHED THE MOUTH OF THE BRIDGE BEFORE THE FIENDISH SNARL OF THE MACHINE GUN SCATTERED THEM . . .

SO,
YOU COME NO FARTHER, ENGLISH PIG-DOGS!



BUT THE THREE NON-COMBATANTS, THROATS DRY AND WITH UNFAMILIAR WEAPONS IN THEIR HANDS, KEPT GOING . . .



THE GERMAN MACHINE GUN CREW STARED GLOATINGLY DOWN AT THE HAVOC THEY WERE CREATING ON THE BRIDGE. THIS WAS THE WAY THEY LIKED FIGHTING ... TO DEAL OUT DEATH FROM A SAFE PLACE...



Combined Operation

AT LEAST, IT HAD BEEN SAFE UNTIL
THREE NON-COMBATANTS DECIDED TO
TAKE A HAND IN THE WAR...

ALL TOGETHER,
MATES...
BASH 'EM!



THE GERMANS HAD BEEN TAKEN UNAWARES.
THE ONLY SPARK OF FIGHT WAS QUICKLY
SNUFFED OUT BY HOT LEAD. BUT THE
BATTLE WAS NOT QUITE OVER . . .

HERE,
THE SARGE HAS
COLLAPSED!



FARTHER ALONG THE RIDGE, A SECOND GERMAN MACHINE GUN CREW CONTINUED TO FIRE ON THE BRITISH TROOPS PINNED TO THE BRIDGE. BULL LICKED HIS LIPS . . .

WELL HERE GOES,
MATES! MIGHT AS
WELL DO THE JOB
PROPERLY!

COR,
YOU'RE A
GLUTTON FOR
PUNISHMENT,
BULL!



Combined Operation

THE SUDDEN SHATTERING BURST OF CROSS-FIRE FROM BULL'S GUN, ERRATIC AS IT WAS, HIT THE GERMAN MACHINE GUN POST LIKE A HURRICANE OF STEEL...



AT LAST, IN THE BLESSED SILENCE, THE THREE NON-COMBATANTS REALISED THAT THE BATTLE WAS OVER. FRIENDS WERE AT HAND! THEY HAD WON THROUGH...



BUT THE FRIENDS WERE NOT YET IN THE CLEAR ! A MORTAR BOMB WHINED LOW OVER THE RIDGE AND EXPLODED VIOLENTLY BEHIND THEM ! AND ANOTHER ...



ENCOURAGED BY THE SILENCE OF THE ENEMY MACHINE GUNS, THE BRITISH TROOPS ON THE BRIDGE WERE BRINGING UP MORE ARTILLERY WHEN ...



Combined Operation





Combined Operation

THE CAPTAIN WAS A KINDLY MAN. BUT AFTER ALL, HE HAD A WAR TO FIGHT. HE COULDN'T WASTE TIME TALKING TO THESE THREE POOR DEVILS...

WE FOUND THEM UP IN THE MACHINE GUN NEST, SIR! THE JERRIES MUST HAVE CAPTURED THEM SOMEWHERE! THEY SEEM A BIT DAZED.



MEANWHILE, THE MAN WHO MIGHT HAVE TOLD THE TRUE HEROIC STORY, SERGEANT MASKELL, WAS BEING CARRIED BACK UNCONSCIOUS TO A BASE HOSPITAL. SOME WEEKS LATER, WHEN HE WAS FIT AND WELL AGAIN...



Combined Operation

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THE SERGEANT HAD TOLD THE STORY TO WHOEVER WOULD LISTEN TO IT IN THE MILITARY HOSPITAL... BUT WHO COULD BE EXPECTED TO BELIEVE IT? FEELING RATHER GUILTY, HE DETERMINED TO SEEK OUT THOSE THREE MEN... AND THE FIRST, GEORDIE, HE FOUND ON AN R.A.F. AIRFIELD AT CATANIA. THE LITTLE AIRCRAFTMAN HAD LONG AGO GOT OVER HIS ANNOYANCE...

I TOLD THEM WHAT
REALLY HAPPENED, GEORDIE!
THEY JUST THOUGHT I WAS
RAVING FROM LOSS
OF BLOOD!

NEVER
MIND, SARGE!
YOU CAN'T WEAR
MEDALS ON
DUNGAREES!

GEORDIE WAS AS HAPPY TO GET BACK TO HIS OWN JOB AS WAS STEWARD JOE HILL...

I WISH
I COULD HAVE
DONE SOMETHING
FOR YOU, JOE!

YOU HAVE,
SARGE! WE'D NEVER
HAVE GOT BACK AT ALL
IF YOU HADN'T KICKED US
ALONG! ANYWAY, I'M
MUCH HAPPIER WITH A
FORK IN MY HAND
THAN A GUN!

Combined Operation

AS FOR SAPPER BULLER, HE WAS ALWAYS THE PHILOSOPHER. THE DESPERATE ADVENTURE THEY HAD SHARED WAS, FOR HIM, A HAPPY MEMORY TO LOOK BACK ON WHILE HE HEAVED AND DUG!



ON THE LAST NIGHT OF HIS SICK
LEAVE, BEFORE HE LEFT FOR
THE FRONT AND THE FIGHTING,
THE TOUGH YOUNG VETERAN
DRANK A TOAST . . .

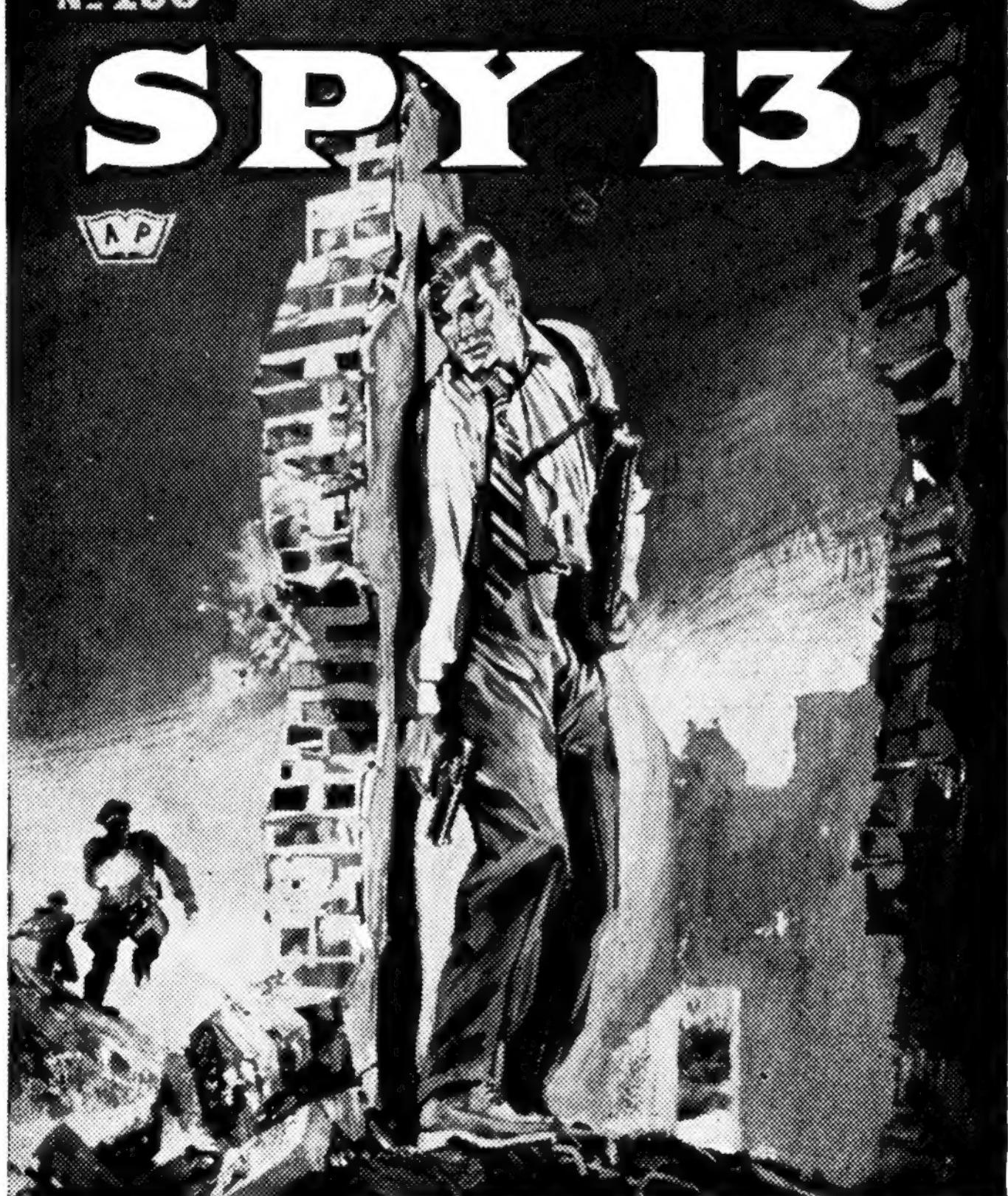


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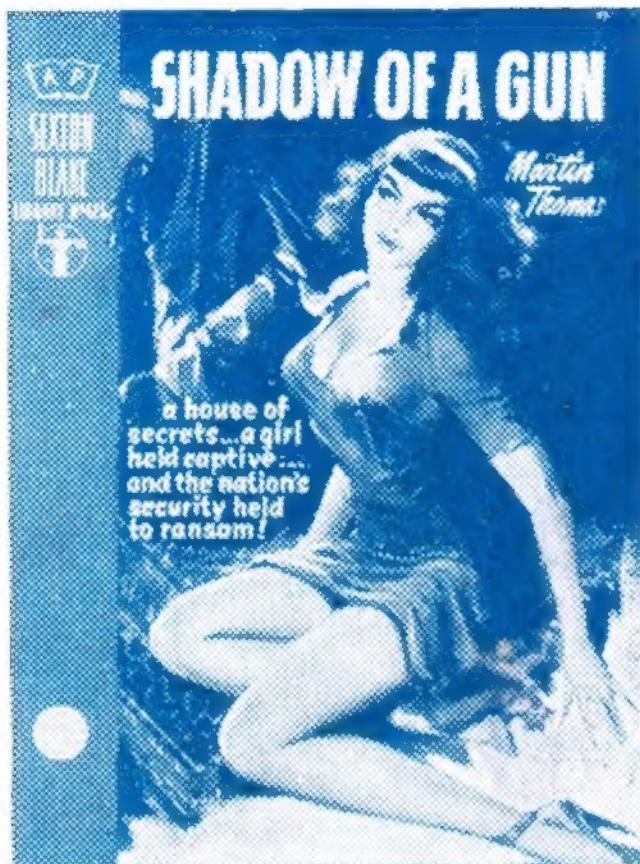
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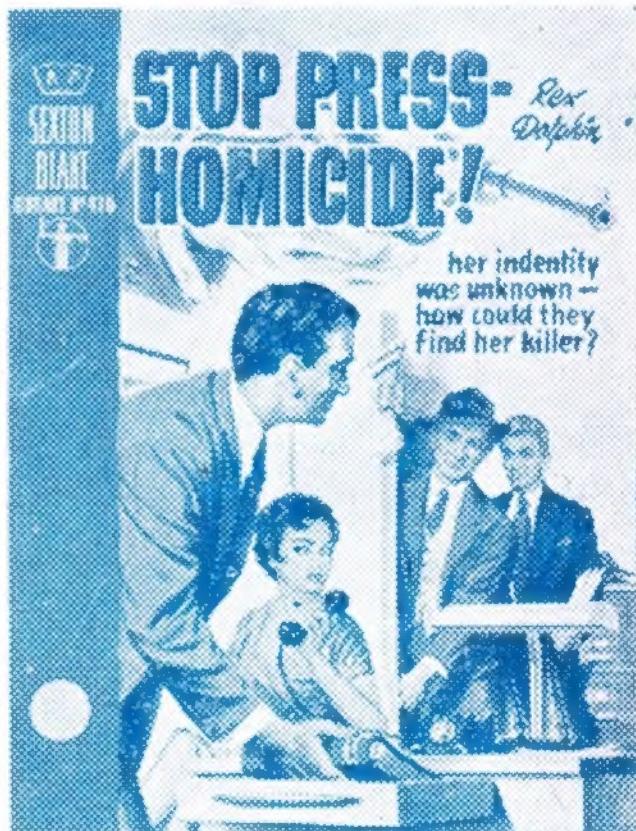
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